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SUBJECT: CODEL BERMAN MEETS ZIMBABWEAN OPPOSITION IN SOUTH AFRICA

REF: A. CODEL AND PAHAD

¶B. CODEL WRAP-UP

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Classified By: A/DCM Donald Schenck for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

This is the third of three cables reporting on CODEL Berman's July 1-6, 2008 visit to South Africa.

¶1. (C) Summary: CODEL Berman met in Johannesburg on July 3 exile members of the Zimbabwean opposition Movement for Democratic Change. They were told that: the June 27 run off was a farce; Mugabe's presidential claim was illegitimate; and a Transitional Authority -- not a Government of National Unity -- was needed to prepare the way out of the crisis via new elections within the next 18 months. They decried the "political culture" in Africa which allowed a loser who was prone to violence to negotiate a power-sharing arrangement. They expressed a complete lack of faith in South Africa's mediation effort, and the AU and the Southern African Development Community to solve this crisis. They invested a modest hope that the UN Security Council could do more. "What we need," one said, is "pressure from the USA and the international community" to insist that the outcome of new elections in Zimbabwe "reflects the will of the people." End Summary.

Masiyiwa Hosts CODEL and Opposition MDC Insiders

¶2. (C) CODEL Berman was hosted on July 3 in the upscale Johannesburg gated suburb of Dainfern by Strive Masiyiwa, a wealthy Zimbabwean businessman who has lived in South Africa for years, and who has been a major player in opposition initiatives against President Robert Mugabe's ruling ZANU-PF party. Masiyiwa invited members of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) to engage the CODEL and discuss the post-June 27 runoff election crisis environment. The participants included among the Zimbabweans: Masiyiwa (Advisor to MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai) M. Thokozani Khupe (MDC Vice President), Roy Bennett (MDC Treasurer once elected to Parliament and later jailed by the GOZ), George Sibotshiwe (Senior Aide and Campaign Manager to Tsvangirai), and Wellington Chadehumbe (Zimbabwean businessman and MDC Policy Advisor). U.S. participants included: House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard Berman (D-CA), George

Miller (D-CA), Ed Royce (R-CA), Thomas Davis (R-VA), Jim Costa (D-CA), Donald Payne (D-NJ), Linda Sanchez (D-CA); their staff, PolCouns (Note Taker), and EconCouns (Control Officer). This meeting took place following a briefing by the SAG DepForMin Aziz Pahad (septel) who conveyed to the CODEL the SAG's official policy and characterization of the situation in Zimbabwe.

A Litany of Woe and Injustice

¶3. (C) Masiyiwa introduced his guests, and set the stage by stating the opposition's view that: the June 27 election was a farce; that Mugabe's claim to executive authority was illegitimate; and the way forward to resolve the crisis required a Transitional Authority (TA) -- not a Government of National Unity (GNU) -- with the MDC in the majority as QNational Unity (GNU) -- with the MDC in the majority as reflected in the March 29 elections and the ZANU-PF (without Mugabe) in the minority. This TA would have a single purpose: to set the stage for new elections in the future that would reflect the will of the people. He lamented the implicit recognition of the African Union (AU) Summit in Sharm el-Sheik that allowed Mugabe's participation as Head of State, and suggested that if Zambian President Mwanamasa had not been medically evacuated with a stroke, he would have led an anti-Mugabe initiative at that summit along with Botswana's President Seretse Khama (who did not attend either). In the absence of these critical voices, and the lack of electoral and democratic credentials of too many other African heads of state, Mugabe was able to take Zimbabwe's seat, and with the help of South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki, was able to divert the AU from taking a strong stand on the crisis. He told the CODEL that prior

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to their arrival, he received a call from the Zimbabwean capital reporting that 200 refugees were at that moment appealing to the U.S. Embassy in Harare for sanctuary, while 300 asylum seekers were also at the South African Embassy.

Power, Fear and Poverty

¶4. (C) Ms. Khupe detailed the repression and violence visited upon opponents of the ZANU-PF for the past twenty five years. She emphasized the massacre of over 20 thousand ZAPU supporters in the mid-1980s, the impact of the economic crisis on the people throughout the 1990s with an incomprehensible 2 million percent inflation rate today, the intensity of the violent response of the ZANU-PF around elections since 2000, and the inhumanity and desperation that drove the most recent campaign of state-sponsored violence prior to and beyond the June 27 "non-election election" run off. In a climate of raw power, fear and poverty, she said, this campaign was driven with a "heartless" determination in a climate of "war against the Zimbabwean people." Two hundred thousand people were displaced, over 200 homes destroyed, 86 people were known dead, but she feared the total was much higher. She criticized the AU for conferring a fig leaf of legitimacy on Mugabe and decried the "political culture" in Africa which allowed "a negotiation for power sharing if you lose an election and threaten violence." She stressed that a Transitional Authority was needed in Zimbabwe to prepare for free and fair elections. "Mugabe must resign," she declared, "Tsvangirai must head the TA, and violence must cease."

Genesis of Catastrophe

¶5. (C) Roy Bennett -- a white Zimbabwean, once coffee farmer and former MP -- said the genesis of the catastrophe that was

unfolding in Zimbabwe was a conflict of values and principals. The ZANU-PF's claim to a right to rule rested on its role in the liberation struggle, and this claim was not based on democratic principles. Mugabe and his key supporters hungered for the power and luxury that came from Zimbabwe's resources and held Zimbabweans for ransom, as a sacrifice to their avarice. He expressed a complete lack of faith in the AU or the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to solve this crisis and hoped the UN Security Council could do more.

¶ 6. (C) George Sibotshiwe, as MDC Campaign Director, described the difficulties the opposition faced in their campaign. He said Mugabe and the ZANU-PF were shocked and surprised at the MDC electoral win on March and immediately set out to make sure they did not lose the run off. The security forces, supplemented by civilian thugs and torturers, led the campaign of violence and intimidation. Their campaign advance man was kidnapped, tortured and murdered, and they were unable to organize mass rallies. They then changed their campaign strategy from mass rallies to a campaign caravan. Roadblocks were then established all around the country that hindered the movement of the caravans and undermined their ability to campaign. He explained that Qand undermined their ability to campaign. He explained that he and his colleagues (some of whom were tortured and others murdered) had to flee Zimbabwe to South Africa and other neighboring countries. He told a harrowing story about how he escaped out the back of a house he was hiding in as GOZ security officers were literally at the front door. He stressed that the environment for the election was perverted such that the MDC had to withdraw in order to save its supporters from further harm. "What we need," he said, is "pressure from the USA and the international community" to insist that the outcome of new elections in Zimbabwe "reflects the will of the people."

¶ 7. (C) Businessman Wellington Chadehumbe called for a "strong, robust position in the UNSC" that recognizes, promotes and supports democracy. He added that a resolution of the crisis called for "broadening the context of mediation" to include UN support for the AU working within

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SADC enhancing South Africa's intervention. These "co-negotiators" would be a strategy to "weaken South Africa's grip" on the mediation effort. Additionally, there was a need to "change the debate" from arguing the bogus outcome of the June 27 farce in favor of the principle of "the will of the people."

The MDC's Favored Solution

¶ 8. (C) The Zimbabwean opposition interlocutors reiterated their position that a TA, not a GNU, is the way forward. The MDC would not participate in a GNU in which they were a "junior partner." The TA would only need six months -- but they would accept 12 - 18 months -- to level the playing field for new elections. This strategy would be based on "clear timelines" with "disincentives" at the end. In response to questions from the Codel, they confirmed that they did not trust South Africa to help them and that they had lost confidence in President Mbeki as a mediator. They understood that the media blitz characterizing the AU and SADC effort as a breakthrough in negotiations for a GNU, though false, were becoming the revealed truth as conveyed by the international media. When asked what their plan was to counter this trend, they emphasized their lack of access and resources that constrained their activities. Bennett and Masiyiwa directly pitched the Codel for funding of the MDC, and Chairman Berman offered to push for a five million dollar supplemental appropriation for promoting democracy in Zimbabwe.

Comment: Leaning into the Wind

19. (C) The MDC is in an unenviable position and they know it. They do not expect much help coming from SADC, especially with South Africa acting under its mandate, Mwanamasa incapacitated, and Swaziland's monarchy, the DR Congo's chaos, and Angola's non-elected government lacking the credibility to call the June 27 election illegitimate. They do not trust in the AU's willingness and ability to come to their aid, considering the many member states whose governments are in power by non-democratic means. They understand their call for an AU peacekeeping force to be deployed to Zimbabwe in advance of new elections is unlikely.

They fear (correctly) that the UNSC will be hamstrung from taking a strong stance as Russia and China could veto any resolution to further pressure Mugabe. Nevertheless, they have been in this game for many years and show no inclination to quit now. Their request for U.S. funding is not, in our view, a shallow effort, and any response on our part should be handled discretely. The forces of history and the multilateral system have not yet come to the rescue of the Zimbabwean opposition and may not do so in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, they are committed to their dream of a new Zimbabwe that has been rehabilitated from its pariah status, and in which the skills and experience of the Zimbabwean Diaspora can be applied to reversing the downward trends since independence.

BOST